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AUTHOR Kim, Hak Soo; Suh, Chung Woo
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ABSTRACT

A study was undertaken (1) to examine the theoretical relationship between communicating and understanding, (2) to test this relationship in the Korean National Assembly's communicative context, and (3) to evaluate how well the assembly's activities were communicated to the public. Twenty respondents from each of three groups surveyed--reporters, assemblymen, and the public--were asked questions about five bills that had been considered by the assembly in one session and extensively reported on in Korea's two largest newspapers. Respondents were also asked to state their orientation toward the bills, to estimate the other two groups' orientations, and to answer questions about information sources. Results provided evidence of the theoretical relationship between communicating and understanding and communicating and accuracy. Both understanding and accuracy were found to be greater between assemblymen and reporters than between either of these groups and the public. In response to questions about how they got information about others' orientations, assemblymen and reporters revealed that they relied more on face-to-face communicating than on media, while members of the public relied heavily on the media. Overall, the results show how poorly assemblymen and reporters communicate with the public about assembly activities. (FL)

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Political Communication Division

COMMUNICATING AND UNDERSTANDING

OF

THE KOREAN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY'S LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITIES

by

Hak Soo Kim
Dept of Journalism & Mass Communication
Hanyang University
Sungdong-ku, Seoul 133
Republic of Korea
phone: (Seoul) 292-2111 ext) 3286 (office)
(Seoul) 447-3975 (home)

Chung Woo Suh
Dept of Mass Communication
Yonsei University
Sudaemoon-ku, Seoul 120
Republic of Korea

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Abstract

This study examines the theoretical relationships between communicating and two kinds of understanding: Understanding as sharing of ideas and accuracy as accurate perception of ideas. Testing the relationships in the Korean National Assembly's communicative context, this also evaluates how well the Assembly's legislative activities are communicated to the public through mass media or other channels. We found that understanding and accuracy were greater with more communicating acts, and Korean assemblymen communicated their legislative activities mainly with reporters while assemblymen or reporters did little with the public. Thus this research exemplifies the dual (theoretical as well as practical) function of one study.

Communicating and Understanding of The Korean National Assembly's Legislative Activities

As we communicate, we may want just to understand each other. Or we may want, further, to persuade each other. Even the latter case usually entails prior understanding. In particular, persuasion to change values is not feasible through brief communicating (Kim, 1982). Therefore the concept of understanding becomes our primary focus as a realistic criterion of communicating. The main purposes of this study are (1) to examine the theoretical relationship between communicating and understanding, (2) to test this relationship in the Korean National Assembly's communicative context, and thus (3) to evaluate how well the Korean National Assembly's activities are communicated to the public. Therefore this study may exemplify the dual (theoretical as well as practical) function of research.

CONCEPTUALIZATION

Communicating is a sequence of communicating acts. The acts function as a vehicle carrying communicative content (Carter, 1969). This explication of the communicating concept suggests the information exchange function of communicating. By conveying our orientations through communicating acts, we exchange orientations as information. Then we come to understand each other better. Therefore, understanding is a direct function of information exchange (Carter, 1965; McLeod & Chaffee, 1973).

The concept of understanding has multiple meanings. When it is said that we understand each other, it usually indicates either that both persons share

some orientation or that one person comprehends another's orientation accurately. The fist meaning focuses on sharing of ideas; the second focuses on accurate perception. However, sharing of ideas excludes agreement: The sharing of summary evaluations. It implies only sharing of orientational content, which communicating as information exchange can accomplish (Chaffee & Mcleod, 1968; Edwards, 1980; Kim, 1986). Accurate perception has been referred to not only as understanding (Cronbach, 1955; Corsini, 1956; Laing, Phillipson, & Lee, 1966; Newmark, Woody, & Ziff, 1977; Sillars, Pike, Jones, & Murphy, 1984) but as comprehension (Clark & Haviland, 1977; Edwards, 1980) or accuracy (Brewer & Brewer, 1968; Mehrabian & Reed, 1968; Christensen & Wallace, 1976; Wackman, 1973; Grunig, 1978; Pavitt & Cappella, 1979; Kim, 1982, 1983, 1986). To distinguish conceptually between the two kinds of understanding here we will use the term "understanding" as sharing of orientational content by both parties and the term "accuracy" as one party's correct perception of another's orientation.

Understanding can be achieved through communicating. We can share each other's ideas by means of communicating. But communicating can also occur because of some "presumed" understanding - - for example, of language, environment, and experience. This understanding should always be taken into account when measuring the understanding achieved in a limited period of communicating. Accuracy is another consequence of communicating. Exchanging information helps each figure out the other's orientation. But one's own perspective (e.g., stereotype) may sometimes bias one's perception of the other's orientation (Pavitt, 1982; Sillars, et al., 1984; Kim, 1986). Especially, when orientation focuses only on summary value (e.g., attitude), high accuracy may result just from perceived agreement and actual agreement, without respect to communicating. In this sense, orientational "content" (not

summary value) should be the conceptual focus of accuracy as well as of understanding. Then accuracy may be a better criterion of communicating than understanding, because null prior accuracy is possible, while some prior understanding is inescapable.

HYPOTHESES

This study tests the theoretical relationships between communicating and both understanding and accuracy in the unicameral Korean National Assembly's communicative context. It goes without saying that the Korean National Assembly's major activity is legislation. And this activity basically concerns developing solutions to public issues. The public then should be well informed about the consideration of laws. Otherwise, the National Assembly would fail to accommodate public inputs to the laws. In Korea, enactment of legislation is virtually controlled by the National Assembly Standing Committees. The plenary session usually endorses pro forma the bills recommended by the Standing Committees. This process of legislating is mostly reported by mass media. That is, mass media help communicating between the National Assembly and the public. Thus, when we check understanding and accuracy between members of the National Assembly and the public for our theoretic test, we also evaluate how well the National Assembly's legislative activities are communicated to the public.

As mediators between members of the National Assembly and the public, mass media reporters in the National Assembly have easier access to the National Assembly than the public has. Reporters not only attend general and committee meetings but visit assemblymen's offices to obtain news. On the other hand, both assemblymen and reporters are not easily available for the public to communicate with. So, we expect more communicating to occur between

assemblymen and reporters than between assemblymen and the public or between reporters and the public. Hence understanding and accuracy (of the National Assembly's legislative activities) will also be higher between assemblymen and reporters than between assemblymen and the public or between reporters and the public. Thus, this phenomenal hypothesis not only tests our theoretical relationship between communicating and both understanding and accuracy, but enables us to practically evaluate how well the communicative activities by mass media or the National Assembly itself inform the public about the National Assembly's legislative activities.

Because theoretic hypotheses sometimes make us overlook practical implications and phenomenal hypotheses make us neglect theoretical implications, here we present both:

Theoretic hypothesis I : Understanding will be greater with more communicating acts.

Phenomenal hypothesis I : Understanding of the National Assembly's legislative activities will be greater between assemblymen and reporters than between assemblymen and the public or between reporters and the public, because more communicating occurs between the professional groups than between either professional group and the public.

Theoretic hypothesis II : Accuracy will be greater with more communicating acts.

Phenomenal hypothesis II : Accuracy of the National Assembly's legislative activities will be greater between assemblymen and reporters than

between assemblymen and the public or between reporters and the public, because more communicating occurs between the professional groups than between either professional group and the public.

No study has been found that deals with concepts of orientational content-focused understanding and accuracy with respect to communicating among legislators, reporters, and the public. However, there are a few studies of summary-value-focused agreement and accuracy (about non-legislative issues) between legislators and reporters or between newspaper editors and readers. One study (Dyer & Nayman, 1977) found that Colorado state legislators and reporters covering the Colorado legislature had high agreement on news criteria, but only the reporters (not the legislators) had high accuracy about the agreement. Another study (Martin, O'Keefe, & Nayman, 1972) found that Wisconsin daily newspaper editors and their public (readers) had little agreement on student protest-related issues and that only the editors perceived this accurately. These two studies measured only agreement and accuracy, without communicating as the predictor being clearly related.

METHODS

The Korean National Assembly was in its 114th regular session from Sept 20 to Dec 18, 1982. This study was done ex-post-facto in Spring 1983. Some bills processed in that session were believed to well represent the National Assembly's legislative activities. Mass media reports were used to select the bills, which assemblymen, reporters, and the public cooriented to and communicated about. [Mass media reports, which bridge gaps between the Assembly and the public, were assumed to represent common concerns

(coorientation) being communicated between them.] Two daily newspapers were used: The Chosun Ilbo as a morning paper having the largest circulation (about one million) in the nation, and the Dong-A Ilbo as an evening paper having the second largest circulation (about 0.9 million). These two papers were believed to represent most Korean newspapers. Broadcast reports were not considered, as the two major nationwide radio and television networks (KBS and MBC) are closely affiliated with the government and thus tend to refrain from reporting political and social controversies.

Fourteen of 113 bills processed in the regular session were found to have been reported not less than three times in both of the two major newspapers. Of these fourteen bills, five were selected by each of a preliminary sample of respondents (ten from each group-assemblymen, reporters, and the public) as the bills of greatest concern to him or her. The public group consisted of students majoring in social sciences at Yonsei Univ., a major university in Korea. They were used on behalf of the public, for they were supposedly more interested in legislative affairs than other non-social-science majors and ordinary people; thus data from the social science majors would enable us to make more conservative inferences about the public. Subsequently, for each group (assemblymen, reporters, and the public) the bills were rank-ordered in terms of frequency of being selected.

The top choice by every group was a bill to amend the press law, which had long been highly controversial. However, we eliminated this bill, because it was withdrawn during the session. A bill to prohibit anonymous "bank" accounts (hereafter referred to as the B bill) and a bill to amend income "tax" rates (hereafter referred to as the T bill) were ranked second and third by both the assemblymen and the reporters, and third and fourth by the students. Also highly close were total frequencies of the two bills being

selected: 15 for the assemblymen, 16 for the reporters, and 14 for the students. Thus the B and T bills were chosen as our coorientational objects for the study.

The B bill proposed by the government was revised and passed during the session. A T bill proposed by the government was defeated, but another T bill was proposed by the National Assembly itself and passed. The questionnaire items checking orientational contents of the B bill asked why it was revised and what particular provisions were revised. The items on the T bill asked what differed between the original T bill proposed by the government and the second T bill substituted by the National Assembly. The changes in the bills rather than the final contents were assumed to best represent the National Assembly's process of legislating (i.e., legislative activities).

The questionnaire used to assess orientational contents was open-ended. The intent was to keep respondents from answering frequently with "random" responses as in the multiple-choice questionnaire. The respondents were asked to report their own orientation and then to estimate the other two groups' orientations to the B and T bills, respectively. Finally, some other questions were asked to assess media exposure. Each respondent was permitted to report any number of his or her own orientational contents and to estimate any number of orientational contents of a generalized other in each of the other groups.

In asking for the other two groups' orientations, the order was alternated for each bill. Thus, four versions of the questionnaire (2 estimates for the other two groups x 2 bills) were produced to eliminate some order effects. Ideally, alternating the order of own orientation and estimates of the other two groups' orientations as well as the two bills would have been needed to completely eliminate order effects. However, the order of estimates for the

other two groups' orientations was believed to be the most important. In any order, one estimate would tend to be transferred to another one.

The questionnaire was pretested, but only on ten students. Too few assemblymen and reporters were available to expend any before the main survey. No particular problems were found in the questionnaire.

For the main survey 20 persons were randomly drawn from each population: the assemblymen, the reporters, and the students. However, only the student respondents were surveyed as originally sampled. Several sampled assemblymen and reporters refused to respond to the questionnaire. These were replaced purposively to retain distributions of assemblymen by political party and of reporters by medium (i.e., print, broadcasting, and wire) similar to those distributions in the two populations. The survey was conducted between May 10 and 30, 1983.

The group was selected as the unit of analysis. We reasoned that communicating occurs between groups in conference rooms or through media rather than between individual persons from different groups.[1] Therefore, all responses about each bill by the members of the each group were pooled and content-analyzed to produce that group's own collective orientation to the bill and that group's estimate of each other group's orientation to that bill.

As conceptualized, mutual understanding was measured as the number of content elements common to both a group's own orientation and another group's orientation. Accuracy between two groups was measured as the number of content elements common to both the first group's estimate of the other group's orientation and the other group's actual orientation "plus" the number of content elements common to both the second group's estimate of the first's orientation and the first group's actual orientation.

Two assistants (a senior and a graduate student both majoring in mass communication) set up content categories. Each category, a unit of an orientational content element, was an idea as simple as possible, like a "premature policy" category of reasons for the B bill revision. These categories were used for comparing the (own and own; own and estimate) orientations of every pair of groups (assemblymen and reporters, assemblymen and the public, and reporters and the public). Reasons for revision of the B bill consisted of eight categories.[2] Changes in the B bill consisted of seven categories.[3] Differences between the government's proposal and the National Assembly's T bill consisted of six categories.[4] The "don't know" or "no interest" responses were excluded in categorization because they could not be used in comparing orientations.

Because we had only one unit of each "group" orientation, no statistical test was used. Thus we present raw data for minimum inference, not relying on probability.

RESULTS

As hypothesized, understanding of the B bill was found to be much greater between assemblymen and reporters than between either of these groups and the public (see Table 1). The difference was more apparent for changes made in the B bill than for reasons that the bill was revised. The understanding between assemblymen or reporters and the public seemed limited by the smaller number of the public's own orientational content elements (see in parentheses within cells of Table 1). This suggests that neither assemblymen nor reporters communicated effectively to the public. The same pattern was found in understanding of the T bill (see Table 2). Here assemblymen had by far the

greatest number of orientational elements, but the public again had the fewest orientational elements.

As hypothesized, the accuracy between assemblymen and reporters for the B bill was found to be double the accuracies between assemblymen or reporters and the public (see Table 3). The public group was much less accurate than the other groups. Accuracies about the T bill had a similar pattern, with the accuracy between assemblymen and reporters being nearly double that between assemblymen or reporters and the public (see Table 4). Here also, the public scored only about half as accurate as the other groups.

Although we had assumed that more communicating occurred between assemblymen and reporters than between assemblymen or reporters and the public, we wanted to check it indirectly. Therefore we asked in the questionnaire how respondents got information about other's orientations. As expected, assemblymen and reporters were found to have gotten each other's group information through face-to-face communicating a little more than through newspapers (see Table 5). They did not report any use of broadcasting. On the other hand, the public (students) relied much more on newspapers than on interpersonal communicating to get their information about the assemblymen's and reporters' orientations. Clearly assemblymen and reporters use both face-to-face communicating and mass media to communicate with each other, while the public relies heavily on the mass media, especially the newspaper. Also this implies indirectly that assemblymen and reporters communicate more with each other than either group does with the public. In conclusion, the findings supported all the theoretical hypotheses. Understanding and accuracy were found to be greater with more communicating acts. And as a practical evaluation this study reveals how poorly assemblymen and/or reporters communicate with the public about the National Assembly's legislative activities.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study provide evidence of the theoretical relationship between communicating and understanding, and communicating and accuracy. But as an ex-post-facto study, we must recognize that our simple checking of usage of communicating channels between groups might not indicate precisely how much communicating occurred between them. Also, because we conducted the survey five months after the end of the National Assembly's regular session, the respondents undoubtedly had forgotten much information, and other events had intervened in their cognitions.

The general low levels of understanding and accuracy of and by the public reflects a mutual lack of communicating between the public and the other groups--assemblymen and reporters. In Korea, this might come from the National Assembly's less outgoing political activities, which reduce the public's exposure to the Assembly. On the other hand, the public might avoid involvement in political activities because of frequent political turmoil. This might inhibit the public from actively seeking information. Anyway, this study shows how poorly the Korean National Assembly and mass media communicate with the public. This may also have the practical implication that the public will not coordinate with their elected representatives in some demanding situations, because accuracy is necessary to successful coordination (Pavitt, 1982).

Along with their theoretical importance, the concepts of understanding and accuracy in relation to communicating can have practical implications, as indicated in this study. Accuracy, in particular, has been used in evaluation research (Grunig, 1974, 1978). Further, we should investigate the antecedents of communicating, not only the consequences (Kim, 1986). Otherwise, we cannot understand the step-taking nature of human behavior (Carter, 1983). And without knowledge of its antecedents we cannot improve communicating.

NOTES

1. Thus individuals from different groups could not pair to be compared each other in terms of their orientations. Also an orientation of a group's generalized individual could not be obtained by averaging the group members' orientations, because each individual member's orientation was assessed as discrete and concrete contents. These made it impossible to use the individual as the unit of analysis.
2. The categories are: 1) economic impact, 2) prematurity, 3) unpreparedness, 4) public opinion, 5) pressure from the privileged class, 6) being too idealistic, 7) psychological anxiety, 8) political conflicts.
3. The categories are: 1) postponement until 1986, 2) step-by-step enforcement & discriminative taxation, 3) preliminary arrangements of administrative procedures & computer facilities, 4) contents favorable to the privileged class, 5) regulation of maximum personal deposit, 6) indefinite postponement, 7) no revisions.
4. The categories are: 1) reduction of the tax rate, 2) structural change of the tax rate, 3) increase of the tax rate, 4) consideration of the government's difficulty in securing financial resources, 5) postponement of enforcing the dividend income tax, 6) more contents favorable to the privileged class.

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Table 1: Understanding of the B bill

Between Groups / The B bill	Assemblymen vs. Reporters	Reporters vs. Public	Assemblymen vs. Public
Reasons for the Revision	13* (26 vs. 14)**	8 (14 vs. 13)	10 (26 vs. 13)
Contents of the Revision	17 (26 vs. 19)	10 (19 vs. 12)	10 (26 vs. 12)

* A score in each cell is a raw datum of understanding.

** For the parenthesis in each cell, the first number indicates the total of the first group's own orientational content elements and the second one indicates the total of the second group's own ones.

Table 2: Understanding of the T Bill

Between Groups / The T Bill	Assemblymen vs. Reporters	Reporters vs. Public	Assemblymen vs. Public
Contents	9* (22 vs. 9)**	6 (9 vs. 6)	6 (22 vs. 6)

* A score in each cell is a raw datum of understanding.

** For the parenthesis in each cell, the first number indicates the total of the first group's own orientational content elements and the second one indicates the total of the second group's own ones.

Table 3: Accuracy for the B Bill

Between Groups / The B Bill	Assemblymen vs. Reporters	Reporters vs. Public	Assemblymen vs. Public
Reasons for the Revision	18* (11 + 7)**	9 (6 + 3)	9 (7 + 2)
Contents of the Revision	21 (10 + 11)	9 (4 + 5)	12 (8 + 4)

* A score in each cell is a raw datum of accuracy.

** For the parenthesis in each cell, the first number indicates an accuracy score on the part of the first group and the second one indicates an accuracy score on the part of the second group.

Table 4: Accuracy for the T Bill

Between Groups / The T Bill	Assemblymen vs. Reporters	Reporters vs. Public	Assemblymen vs. Public
Contents	11* (5 + 6)	6 (4 + 2)	7 (5 + 2)

* A score in each cell is a raw datum of accuracy.

** For the parenthesis in each cell, the first number indicates an accuracy score on the part of the first group and the second one indicates an accuracy score on the part of the second group.

Table 5: Channels of Information-Getting for Estimating Other's Orientations.

Subject (estimating)	Object (being estimated)	Channels of Information-Getting				
		Newspaper	Broadcasting	Face-to-Face	Others	Sum
Assemblymen	Reporters	8**	0	11	1	20
	Public	6	0	12	1	19
Reporters	Assemblymen	6	0	11	3	20
	Public	9	1	4	6	20
Public*	Assemblymen	10	1	6	3	20
	Reporters	13	1	5	0	19

* Public are university students here.

** A score in each cell indicates the number of respondents.